

# The 36<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church

## Summary

by  
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Over 700 commissioners from across the EPC gathered for the 36<sup>th</sup> General Assembly June 21-25. Members of Ward, the host church served its guests magnificently throughout the Assembly. Commissioners enjoyed the opportunity to recognize and express its appreciation to the hundreds of Ward volunteers who assembled on the platform at the Friday morning business session.

The theme of the 2016 Assembly was “Renewed,” from Revelation 21.5. Driving much of the schedule of this year’s GA was the EPC’s vision to become a global movement through multiplication (church planting), transformation (church revitalization) and effective biblical leadership.

As I explained to the 200+ first time commissioners to an EPC Assembly, there are four reasons we gather together annually: 1) Worship God, 2) Be inspired and equipped for ministry for Jesus Christ, 3) enjoy fellowship with one another and 4) do the business of the mission of the larger church. This summary addresses these in reverse order:

### **Business of the larger church**

1. Position Paper on Human Sexuality. On Friday the Assembly approved the work of the Interim Committee that had been tasked at the 2015 Assembly with producing a Position Paper on Human Sexuality. This paper replaces the Position Paper on Homosexuality and the Position Paper on Marriage. Led by Sandy Willson, the goal of the team that drafted the paper was “to state clearly and compassionately to the church and world our beliefs about God’s design for human sexuality.” With this approval this position paper, which is six pages in length, it became officially a “Preliminary Position Paper of the EPC” (emphasis added). It is now available on the EPC website ([www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org)) and is to be reviewed by presbyteries and churches in the coming year. As position papers require the approval of two Assemblies, it will be taken up by the 2017 Assembly meeting at Fair Oaks Church in Sacramento, CA.
2. Fraternal Relations. Among the fraternal guests welcomed at this Assembly was the first time visit of leadership of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM). Pastor Amador Hernandez, INPM President (Moderator) addressed the Assembly on Thursday. On Friday the Assembly approved entering a fraternal relationship with the INPM. The primary focus of this agreement is partnering in church planting. The largest Presbyterian church in the western hemisphere, the INPM is interested in planting churches in Hispanic communities in the US and in northern Mexico, where it has little presence. Former Moderator Mike Moses will lead an EPC team to the September 5-9 meeting of the General Assembly of the INPM to finalize the agreement. The Assembly also received greetings from Dr. Joseph D’Souza, President of the Dalit Freedom Network in India.

3. EPC History. On Friday afternoon “Liberty in Non-essentials,” the history of the EPC was presented to the Assembly. It was authored by TE Don Fortson, Professor of Church History at RTS-Charlotte. It was dedicated to Stated Clerk Emeritus L. Edward Davis, who served as the first Stated Clerk of the EPC from 1981-2000.
4. Moderators. At its opening session on Wednesday Scott Griffin was elected Moderator of the 36<sup>th</sup> Assembly. Scott is an RE at New Hope-Kent, WA, which is in the Presbytery of the Pacific. On Saturday morning Dean Weaver, lead pastor of Memorial Park-Pittsburgh, PA was elected Moderator-elect.
5. Opening and closing sharing and prayer. At the opening of the Wednesday business session Assistant Stated Clerk Ed McCallum, recovering from a severe case of acute pancreatitis expressed his appreciation for the support and prayers he had received since early April and gave a report on his progress and scheduled June 29 surgery. Before leading the Assembly in prayer at the Thursday business session, David Swanson, lead pastor of First-Orlando shared how the church is ministering to those suffering from the June 11 shooting death of Christina Grimmie and the June 12 terrorist attack and murder of 49 at the Pulse nightclub. Others who did this ministry included Brian Steadman, pastor of the Resurrection-Sheepshead Bay, NY church plant, Diane Mizell, Jerry Iamurri and Jeremy Vaccaro, who reported on revitalization and vitalization efforts in EPC churches and David Galbraith and Pete Scribner, who reported on the Flint water crisis.

### **Enjoying Fellowship**

To encourage connecting on a personal level, the annual meeting features 90 minute lunch breaks. The option of gathering in affinity groups over lunch has grown in popularity in the past few years. A total of 24 Network lunches were offered Wednesday through Friday. Themes of these lunches ranged from church planting and church revitalization to reaching the next generation, help with search processes, WO activities and retirement planning.

### **Inspiring and Equipping for Ministry**

Led by Bill Enns, the Leadership Institute (LI) is the primary way this function is carried out at the Assembly.

Tuesday. Tremendous growth is taking place in the Tuesday afternoon segment of the LI. Last year LI offered four tracks that were attended by approximately 300. This year registration for the eleven tracks offered numbered 486. In keeping with the EPC’s vision to become a global movement through multiplication, transformation, and effective biblical leadership we offered courses in church revitalization, church planting (especially planting churches in non-suburban areas), principles of leadership in the church, conflict reconciliation, and both pastoral health as well as pastoral transitions. Our Coalition for Christian Outreach partners presented a track on reaching the Next Generation of college students. Another track

presented an overall trajectory of biblical understanding our children should receive in their Christian Education classes. The World Outreach track was “Missionary Practices for US Churches.”

Plenary speakers. Three topics were addressed in the LI plenary sessions Wednesday and Thursday morning. On Wednesday Christopher Yuan and his mother Angela told the moving story of how they found Christ and how he was brought out of a lifestyle dealing drugs and engaging in homosexual behavior. He challenged the Assembly to pursue “holy sexuality” in the power of the Holy Spirit. Other tasks he encouraged commissioners to consider: 1) Because pornography is very accessible on the internet and Christians have a problem with it, internet filters such as [www.K9WebProtection.com](http://www.K9WebProtection.com) and an accountability program such as [www.X3Watch.com](http://www.X3Watch.com) are excellent helpful (and free) resources. 2) Because our children are learning about sex and sexuality at a very young age, the church needs to challenge parents to teach their children about these topics before the world does, and 3) Because the LGBTQ community is one of the least reached groups in the US, the church needs to reach out to these people with the love of Christ. While Christopher did not read the proposed Position Paper on Human Sexuality, his remarks were an excellent complement to that paper.

At the first Thursday morning session WO Director Phil Linton led a presentation on the plight of Syrian refugees, the greatest humanitarian crisis of this generation. A video was shown explaining the ministry of WO missionaries Noor and Rebecca, and the tremendous ways God is blessing their efforts with children and adults coming to Christ. In addition, EPC WO is working to provide audio Bibles on SD cards in Turkish border areas, recruiting and equipping evangelists to work with refugees from the Middle East in Europe, and recruiting people to take short-term mission trips to the Middle East in 2017 through ELIC, teaching English to the children of refugees.

The latter part of the morning was given over to the work of the Iraq Christian Relief Council. Juliana Taimoorazy challenged the Assembly to take to heart the tragic plight of the Assyrian Christian community. In 2003, there were over 2 million Christians in Iraq, but now there are only 200,000. For more information, see [www.iraqichristianrelief.org](http://www.iraqichristianrelief.org). She concluded her presentation with a powerful video presentation which you can find at [www.singloudermovie.org](http://www.singloudermovie.org).

## **Worship**

The Assembly convened with worship on Wednesday afternoon. Host church lead pastor Scott McKee preached on I Samuel 3. Ward is celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding in 2016. Scott reflected on “lessons learned” for Ward’s 60 years and himself across his ten years of ministry there.

Wednesday night worship featured a video presentation of Ward’s ministry in a Detroit inner city neighborhood. Music was provided by the Selected of God Gospel Choir. A powerful sermon was delivered by Harvey Carey, senior pastor of Citadel of Faith Covenant Church in Detroit. Based on Isaiah 58.9-12 Carey urged the EPC to depend more on the God who promises to be

with us, to get busy about obeying God's call to help the needy and to experience God's blessings for a transformed society.

The Thursday night worship service focuses on missions and the global church. Seven new WO missionaries were commissioned as well as four who have been on the field but had not been able to attend a previous Assembly to be commissioned. Dr. Davi Gomes, Chancellor of MacKenzie University of Sao Paulo, Brazil and board member of the World Reformed Fellowship preached on Amos 9.11-15 and Acts 15.13-18.

Former Moderator Mike Moses preached at the Moderator's Communion service on Friday morning. As one commissioner described it, Mike "took off the 'Superman cape' and talked very honestly about the personal struggles he has faced as a pastor."

Worship on Friday night featured a surprise appearance by Keith and Kristyn Getty, who led the Assembly in singing before Leighton Ford spoke. The Gettys are best known for "In Christ Alone."

On Saturday morning Ward Director of Music Billy Petty led the Assembly in congregational singing and Mark Fuller, pastor of Trinity-Plymouth, MI preached "Got Peace?" from John 20.19-23.

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